

# Healthy Nevada Lands



**Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands,  
Wildlife and Free-Roaming Horses**

*DBA: Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands*

*<https://www.facebook.com/pg/healthynevadaland/posts/>*

# Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife & Free- Roaming Horses

## **Mission:**

Ensure that Nevada's lands are managed to conserve preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship in habitats for horses, burros and wildlife. Achieve a thriving ecological balance that will result in productive and sustainable habitat for over 700 species of wildlife, free-roaming horses and burros and livestock, which depend on these lands.



# Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife & Free- Roaming Horses



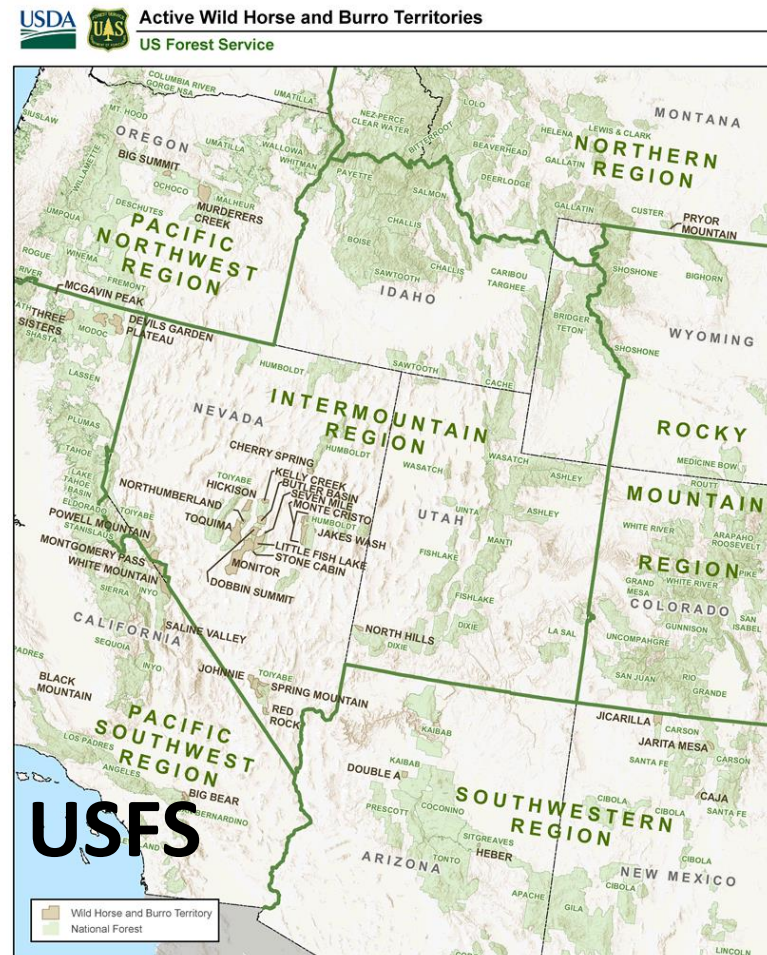
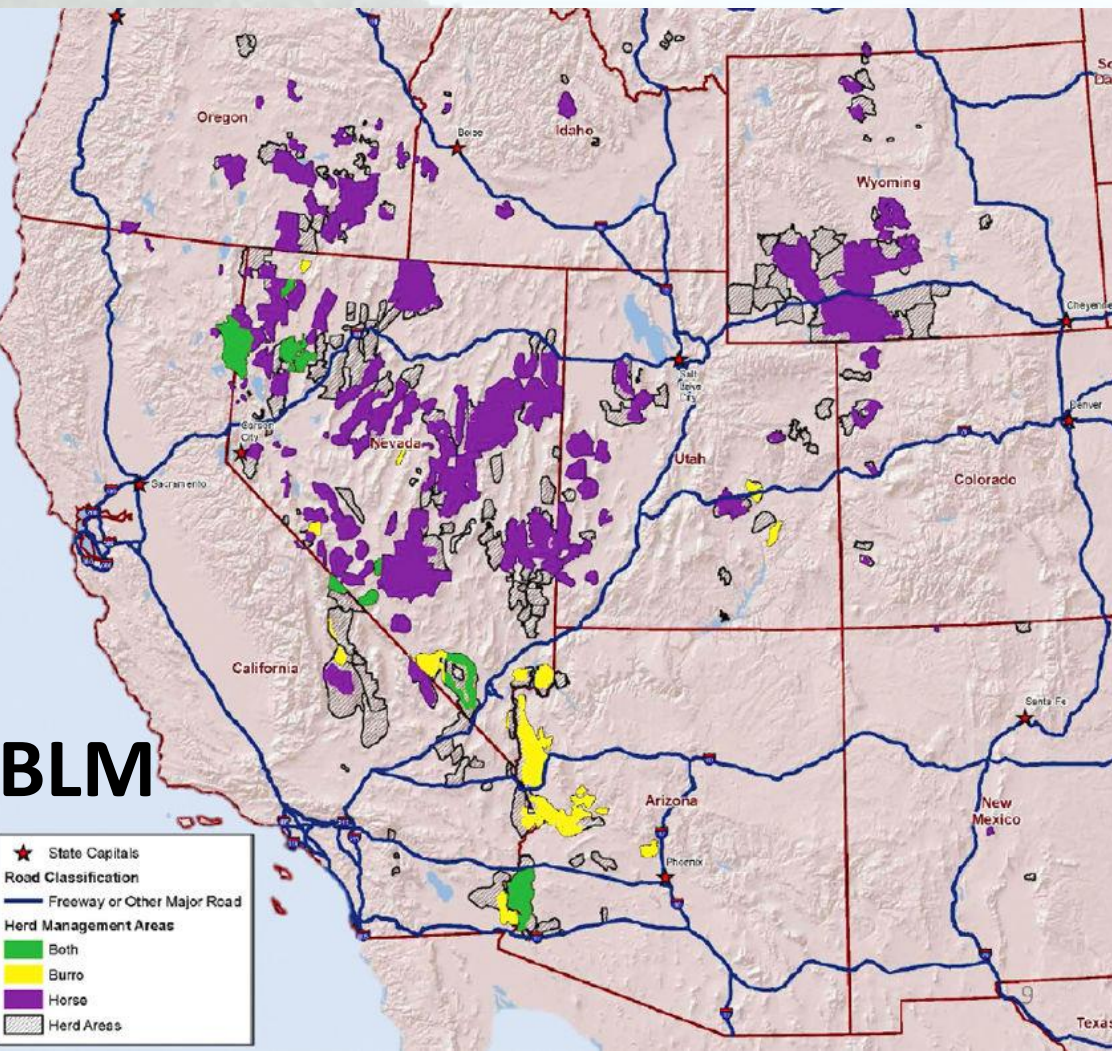
**Goal:** Work through the political process to enable change in wild horse management to achieve the thriving ecological balance called for in The Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971.

**Objectives include:** Educate the public about how the current management situation inhibits mission attainment. The habitat impacts of FRHB's are unsustainable with continued exponential population growth.



# Fact or Fiction?

## Nevada is the largest “landlord” of Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros, more than 50%



Prepared by the USDA Forest Service  
Geospatial Technology and Applications Center  
Salt Lake City, Utah, 2017  
Abers Equal Area Projection

The USDA Forest Service uses the most current and complete data available. GIS data and product accuracy may vary. Using GIS products for purposes other than those for which they were intended may yield inaccurate or misleading results.



# **Vision 1971 Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act**

They are an **integral part of the natural system of the public lands**

The Secretary shall manage wild free-roaming horses and burros to achieve and maintain a **thriving natural ecological balance**

**“Excess animals” must be removed from an area to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance** and multiple-use relationship

All management activities shall be at the minimal feasible level and shall be carried out **in consultation with the wildlife agency of the State**

**To protect the natural ecological balance of all wildlife species**, particularly endangered wildlife species

**Protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation**

**Appropriate management levels (AML)**

**Sustained ecosystems and habitats for wild and free-roaming horses and burros, wildlife, and multiple land users**

**Thriving horses, burros, wildlife, livestock, and habitats**

# Reality 1971 Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act

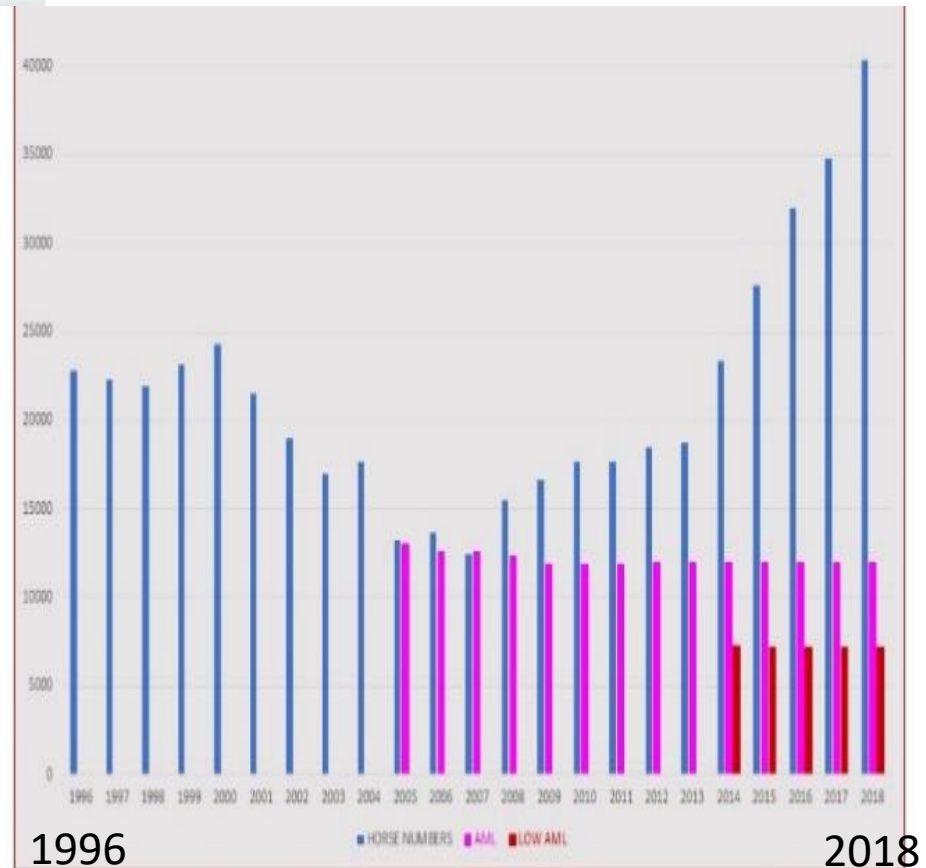
AML should be a range from low to high to avoid annual gathers

We almost achieved AML in 2007, but failed to maintain AML

Nevada BLM Horse population size (blue) compared to high (pink) and low (red) AML

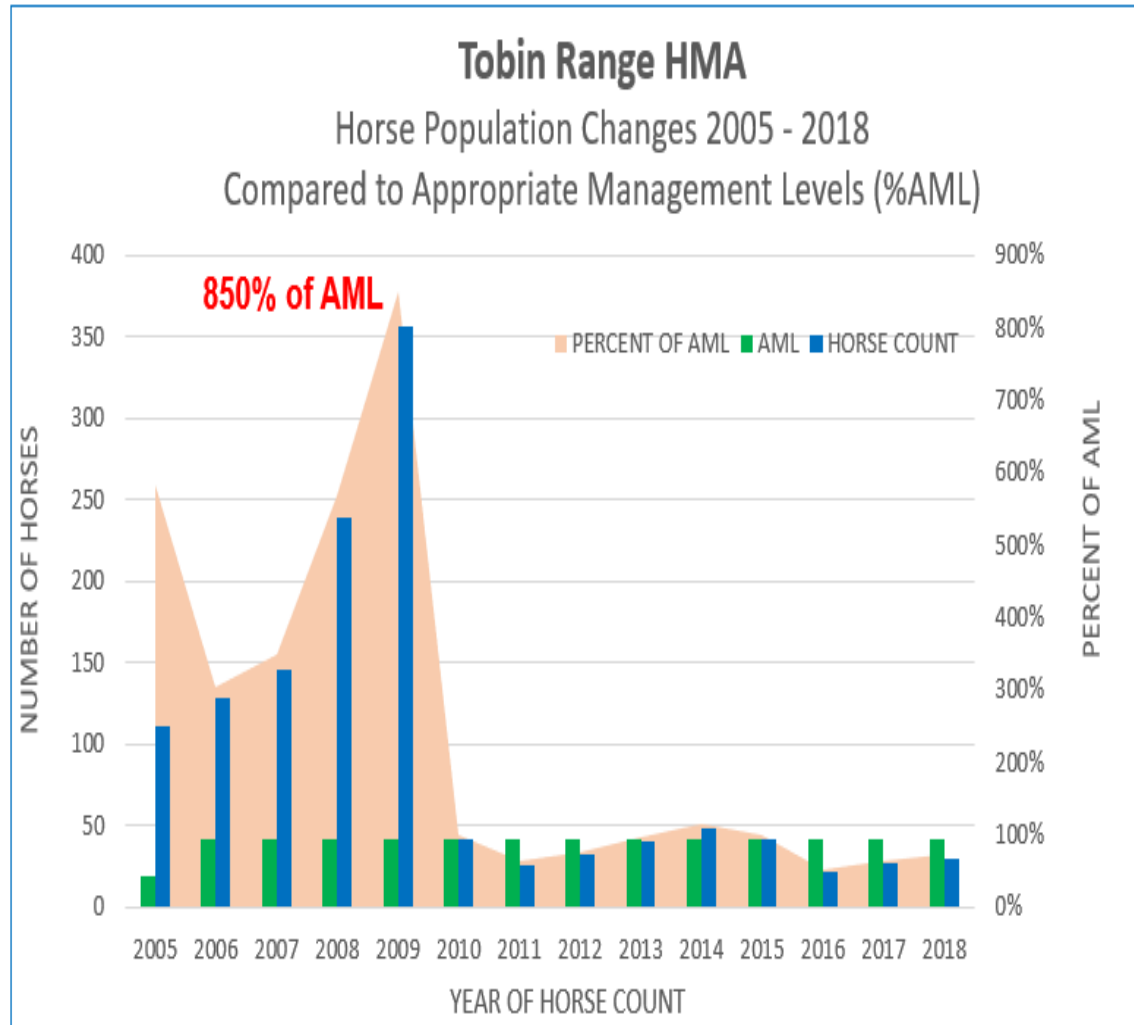
40,000

10,000



# Management is about Maintaining FRHB within their Carrying Capacity, AML

Gathers maintain herd numbers  
Calling gathers reductions misleads people



# In Nevada & Nationally, Current numbers are Record High and Unsustainable

Without gathers,  
populations grow  
exponentially  
(they double in  
3-6 years)

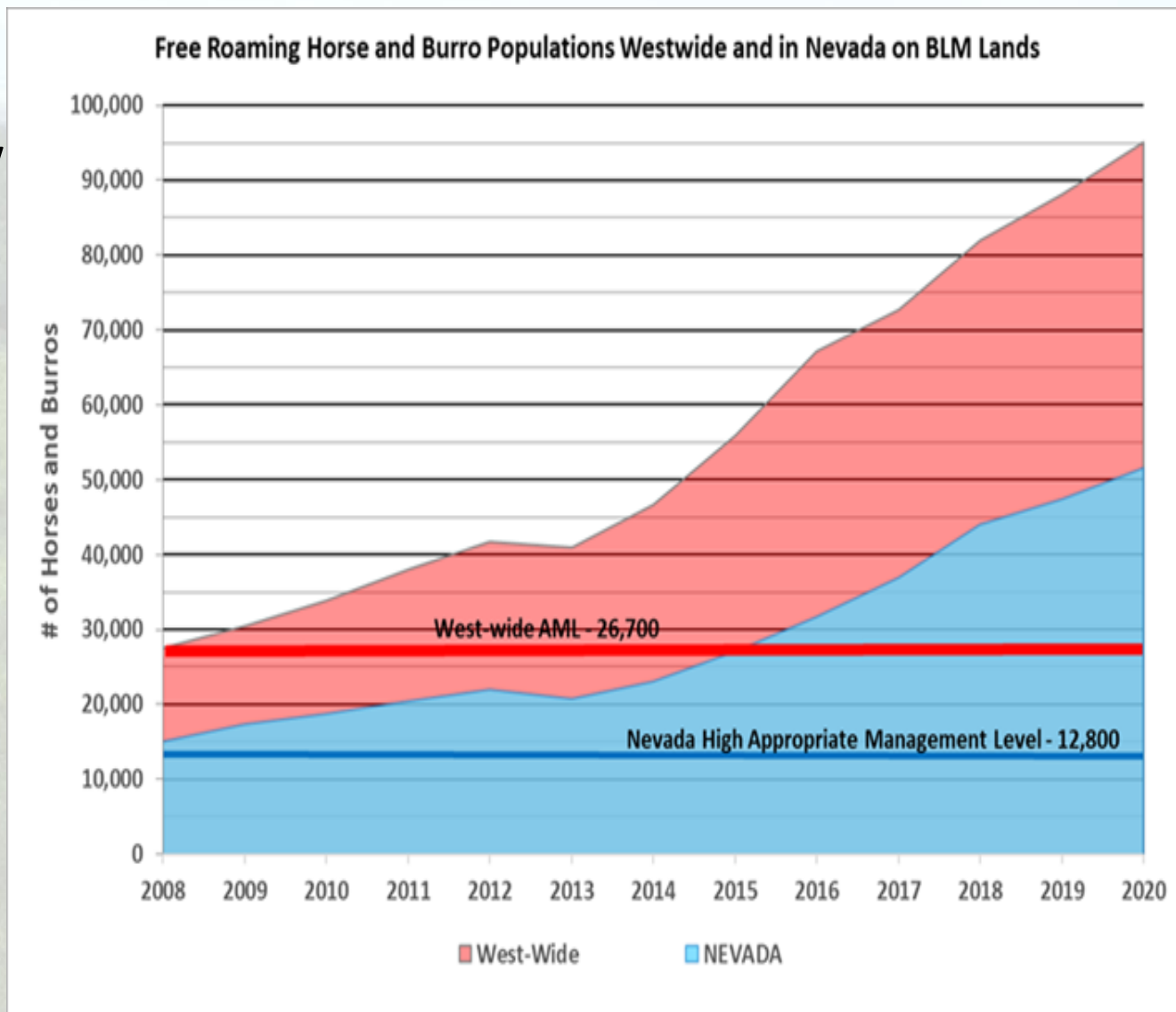
1 x AML

2 x AML

4 x AML

8 x AML

16 x AML





# In Nevada & Nationally, Current numbers are Record High and Unsustainable

Without gathers,  
populations grow  
exponentially (they  
double in 3-6 years)

At AML growth rate is 25%  
(3 years to double)

Above AML the rate = 18%  
(4 years to double)

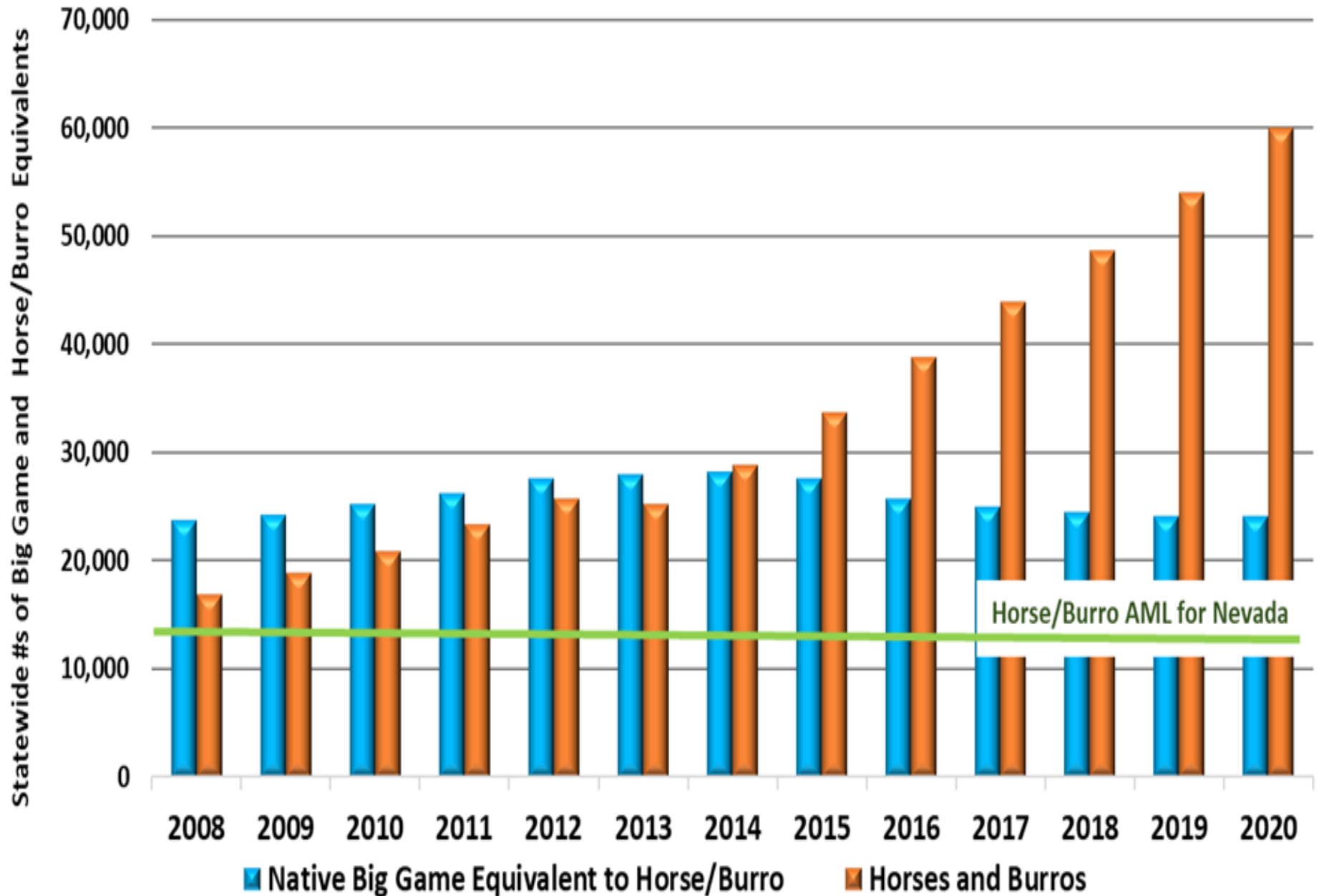
When starving, = 12-15%  
(5-6 years to double)

Growth rates provided by Alan Shepherd, former NV  
BLM FRHB S Program lead



2018.06.14 10:33

## # of Comparable Native Big Game Equivalents and Horses/Burros in Nevada





# Horses and Sage-Grouse



Sage-grouse population decline is directly correlated with % over AML of horse populations:

Direct avoidance on leks

Diminished forage and cover

Loss of resilience →

cheatgrass/fire

shrinking riparian habitat

**Animals, horses and wildlife,  
healthiest at AML  
happiest at AML**



# Multiple Riparian Resource Values

## Values include:

**Water/Habitat for FRHB, Fish/Wildlife and Livestock**

**Endangered Species or species of concern,**

**Recreation and Beauty**

**Sensitive plants,**

**Water quality,**

**Pollinators,**

**Forage**



Horses use spring-fed meadows 50 times more than surrounding rangelands (cattle 30 times more)



# Many Riparian Areas Grazed by FRHB are Shrinking & Drying

- Inadequate stabilizing riparian vegetation allows trampled soil to erode
- Altered flow patterns concentrate water flow for drainage and erosion





# Horses, Burros, and Cattle Concentrate in Riparian Areas

## Attributes of horses and burros that MITIGATE rangeland & riparian impacts

Horses often travel farther from  
water to forage than cattle

Some herds or bands migrate, so  
some riparian areas are not used  
year long

## Attributes of horses and burros that MAGNIFY rangeland & riparian impacts

Horses selectively graze spring  
meadows even more than cattle

Even migrating herds use summer  
range throughout the growing  
season

Horses and burros, with one  
stomach, eat 15-20% more forage  
for their size

Horses and burros with top and  
bottom incisor teeth can bite off  
root crowns of perennial plants

FRHB dominate riparian area use  
where present with big game year  
round



# **Horses, Burros, and Cattle Concentrate in Riparian Areas**

## **That need more recovery than damage to function**

Strategies for managing **cattle**  
grazing of riparian areas

**Short grazing period**

**Long recovery period**

**Occasional growing season rest**

**Riparian pasture**

**Moderate to light intensity**

**Cool season use only**

**Graze early in season**

**Even use and two years rest**

**Off-stream water access**

**Regrowth before winter**

**Vary season from year to year**

**Riding, herding, & stockmanship**

**Cleaned pastures**

**Salt/supplement scattered**

Strategies for managing **horse and burro** grazing of riparian areas

**Manage populations for AML**

**Off-stream water access**

# Coalitions Support AML

National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition

<http://www.wildhorserange.org/>



Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystems Sustainability Network

<https://extension.usu.edu/freesnetwork/resources>



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and Ecosystem  
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# The Path Forward

Conduct targeted **gathers and removals** at densely populated Herd Management Areas (HMAs) to reduce herd size and make progress towards **AML**

Treat gathered horses and burros with **population growth suppression tools** prior to being returned to the range

**Relocate horses and burros to large cost-effective, humane pasture facilities** funded through public-private partnerships

**Promote adoptions** in order to help reduce captive populations and costs

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty  
to Animals

American Farm Bureau Federation

Society for Range Management

Humane Society Legislative Fund

Public Lands Council

Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation

National Horse and Burro Rangeland  
Management Coalition

Eureka County, NV County Commission Office

Humane Society of the United States

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Beaver County, UT County Commission Office

American Mustang Foundation

Utah Governor Office



# Humane Treatment of FRHB

## **Inhumane Treatment**

Careless endangerment at  
or after gathering (rare)

Starvation or Dying of  
thirst by horses in  
populations over AML  
(too common)

## **Humane Treatment**

Healthy horses on healthy  
rangelands (our goal)

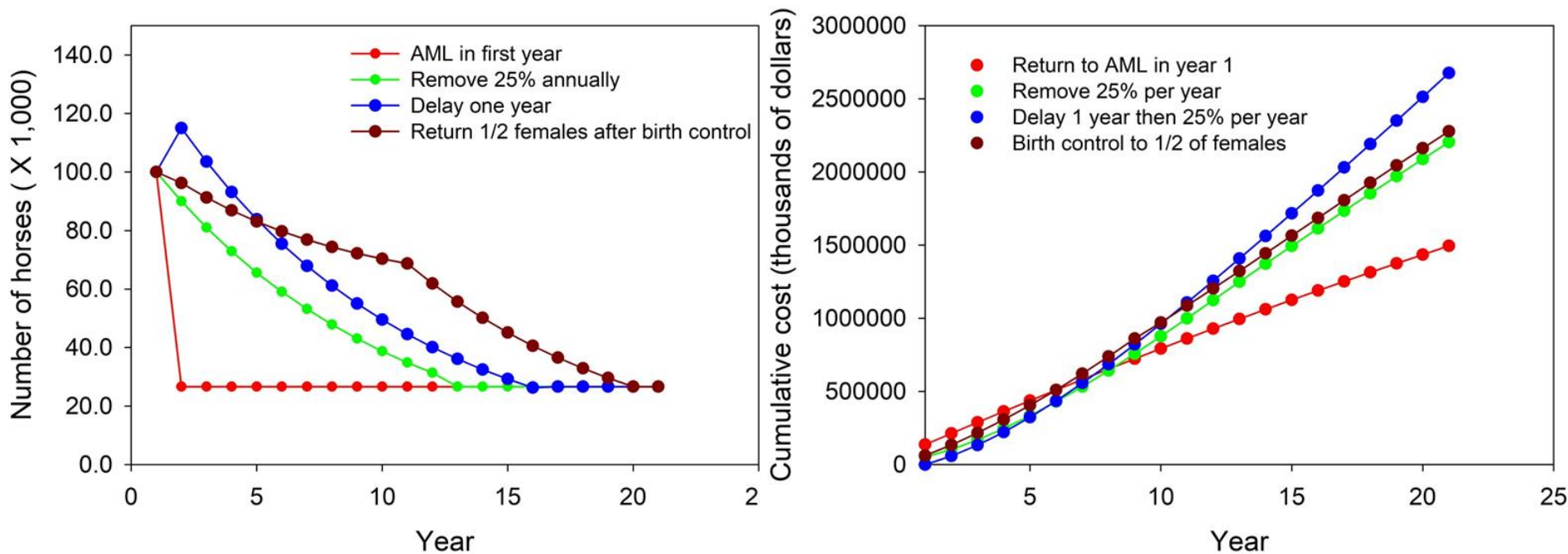
Off-range horses on  
pastures with forage  
water and care (the best  
path forward)

# The Best Path Forward

The amount and lasting impact of damage to wildlife and habitats are governed by excess population size and time needed to achieve AML

Without long-term fertility control, the cost each year of gathering for short-term fertility control is similar to off-range holding and excess animals continue to impact habitats.

The lowest cost (BEST) option is gathering to AML as soon as possible



# The Best Path Forward

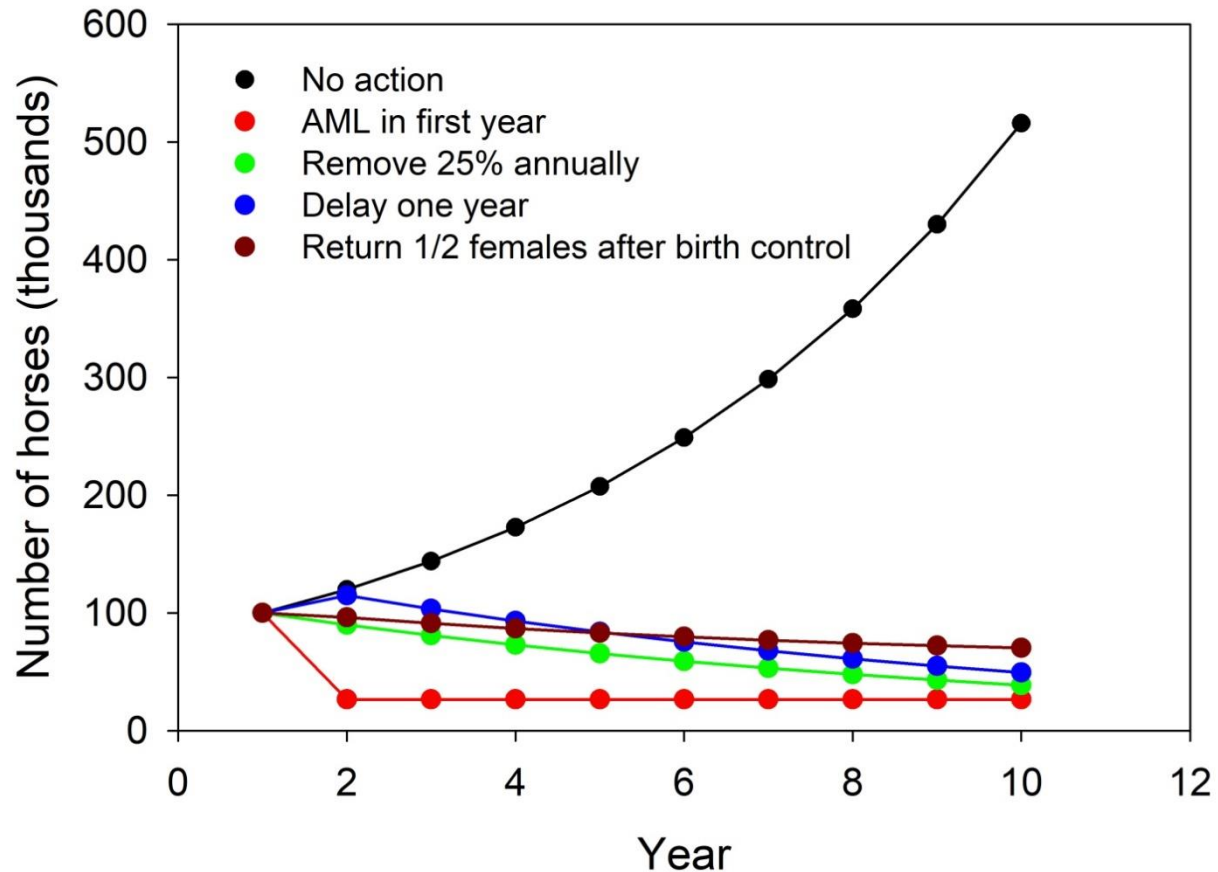
The amount and lasting impact of damage to wildlife and habitats are governed by excess population size and time needed to achieve AML. Without long-term fertility control, the cost each year of gathering for

short-term fertility control

animals continue to increase

The lowest cost option is

**Failure to address this moment is OMINOUS**





# The Best Path Forward

The amount and lasting impact of damage to wildlife and habitats are governed by excess population size and time needed to achieve AML. Without long-term fertility control, the cost each year of gathering for short-term fertility control is similar to off-range holding and excess animals continue to impact habitats.

The lowest cost option is gathering to AML ASAP. Failure to address this moment is ominous.

**Adoptability of horses is largely governed by their age and numbers. At AML, 5,413 excess animals per year is less than demand and this number could be entirely young animals (younger than 5 years). Financial incentives to adopt horses reduces long-term government costs. Longer term growth suppression fertility treatments can reduce the frequency of gathers and the numbers of FRHB available for adoption.**





Grazing Over Long Periods  
Selects the Best and  
Fertilizes the Rest

The grazed plant that regrew  
is the best

When the perennials wear out  
the annuals invade faster,  
thrive and then fuel  
frequent big fires





# Nevada Symbols **Impacted** by Ecological Damage from Excess FRHB

State Flower – Sagebrush

Depends on the

State Grass – Indian Ricegrass --  
and other deep-rooter  
perennials needed for  
resilience after fire



State Animal - Desert Bighorn  
Sheep and the

State Fish – Lahontan Cutthroat  
Trout often depend on well  
vegetated riparian areas where  
soil protected from erosion  
stores water for dry seasons.





A herd of wild horses of various colors (white, grey, brown, black) is grazing in a lush green field. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky.

# Questions or Comments?

Horse Rich Dirt Poor <https://wildlife.org/horse-rich-dirt-poor/>

Controlling Wild Horses <https://www.thisamericanland.org/?episodes=controlling-wild-horses/>